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ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
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FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
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INFO RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 7599  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ APR LIMA 3645  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 4289  
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 3525

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 003574

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/19/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: SENATOR REED MEETS WITH MINISTER OF DEFENSE OSPINA

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood. Reasons: 1.4 (b) & (d)

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SUMMARY  
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1. (C) In a cordial 50 minute meeting on April 19, Senator Jack Reed (D-RI) and Ambassador Wood met with Minister of Defense (MOD) Camilo Ospina, Commander of the Colombian Armed Forces General Carlos Ospina, Colombian National Police (CNP) Director Jorge Castro, and Vice Minister of Defense Jorge Eastman. MOD Ospina expressed concern over a recently released Crime and Narcotics Center (CNC) report on coca cultivation showing more crops in Colombia than previously estimated. The Ambassador said the report will improve eradication efforts by providing a more realistic analysis of the target. Castro highlighted progress against narco-terrorism, as reflected by greater citizen confidence, strong election turn-outs, and economic dynamism. MOD Ospina argued that the United States should adopt a long term policy of assistance to Colombia, and Senator Reed said he shared this vision. MOD Ospina, Senator Reed, and the Ambassador agreed that other countries, particularly in Europe, should assist Colombia's counter-narcotics efforts. MOD Ospina said relations with other Latin American countries were positive, and the climate with Venezuela was "good, but difficult." He explained that economic interests prevent Colombia from taking a more hard-line approach to President Chavez. MOD Ospina raised the issue of human rights and the San Jose de Apartado peace community, pointing out GOC efforts to improve the situation there and inviting U.S. officials to observe first hand the progress. End Summary.

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PROGRESS ON COCA ERADICATION  
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2. (C) MOD Ospina said he was concerned over the recently released CNC report on 2005 coca cultivation showing more crops than previously estimated. The Ambassador said the report was significant because it improves our understanding of the problem. "We are going to be working on a more realistic basis," he said. The Ambassador said 2004 estimates of 160,000 hectares of coca crops were undercounted by 50,000 hectares. Taking this into consideration, the 2005 finding of 144,000 hectares actually demonstrates significant improvement. MOD Ospina noted the environmental need for eradication efforts, explaining that coca cultivation is destroying large parts of the Amazon. What seems like a distant concern now can quickly become a "grave environmental problem," he said.

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POLICE PERSPECTIVE  
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13. (C) CNP Director Castro referred to the counter-narcotics effort as an "integral fight," involving eradication, extradition, effective prosecution, asset forfeiture, and interdiction. He agreed with MOD Ospina that eradication results were not as strong as expected, but stated, "We want to continue our intense efforts." He highlighted the importance of "tabulating" certain achievements in the fight against narco-terrorism that are not normally measured as benchmarks, citing greater trust among citizens, voter confidence, and economic dynamism. "Our efforts are reflected in more hotel occupancies, record road travel, and cruise lines returning to Colombia." He also thanked the Ambassador for the use of U.S. aerial resources in ensuring that the March Congressional elections took place in a safe environment for voters. Senator Reed asked if there was police presence in all cities. Castro replied that although every county seat now had police presence, certain small villages still lacked such security. He stated that the CNP's goal was to establish a permanent presence in 100 percent of the territory in the next four years. "Every day we are making progress," he said.

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GOC PRESSES FOR LONG TERM U.S. SUPPORT IN DRUG WAR  
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14. (C) MOD Ospina called U.S. counter-narcotics support vital and highlighted the necessity for the United States to adopt a long term "state policy" of supporting the GOC in the fight against narcotics trafficking. He said the GOC wanted to fight illicit crops "to the last coca leaf," but if U.S. support was not constant, "the narcos could regroup and react." Senator Reed commented, "Your battle is our battle," but cautioned that commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan may prevent assistance from being "as robust as in the past." He expressed his desire to allocate long-term, sustainable aid to Colombia and said the U.S. needs to find the "way and will" to provide such assistance. The Ambassador explained that with Plan Colombia in its consolidation phase and the truncated legislative year, a Colombia assistance package would likely soon be brought before Congress. Senator Reed added that with possible major changes to Congress' composition, it was important "to get the Plan out quickly."

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WHERE ARE THE EUROPEANS?  
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15. (C) MOD Ospina stated that the U.S. can do more to get other countries involved with counter-narcotics programs, especially in Europe. He explained that although Europeans account for 50 percent of cocaine consumption, they don't want to take any blame for contributing to the problem or confront the issue. "Europe does not listen to us. They are more concerned with Africa and the Middle East, and Latin America simply isn't a priority." Senator Reed explained European commitments in Afghanistan were partly responsible for drawing their attention away from the region, but agreed with the need to "get our allies on board." The Ambassador said an extended Plan Colombia should address how the Europeans and other countries would join the fight.

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RELATIONS WITHIN THE REGION...AND VENEZUELA  
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16. (C) According to MOD Ospina, Colombia enjoys positive relations with the entire continent, but sometimes "feels lonely" in the region. He said Colombia tries to maintain stability in northern Latin America, and praised the CNP's cooperation with Central American countries in combating narcotics trafficking and interstate crime. On Venezuela, MOD Ospina described relations as "difficult, but good." He explained that Colombia receives help from the Venezuelans in the fight against narcotics trafficking but not in the fight against terrorism. He said the GOC is unable to take a more confrontational position against President Chavez due to

Colombia's reliance on trade with Venezuela. If the border with Venezuela were to be closed, he explained, Colombia's economy would suffer much more than Venezuela's. MOD Ospina said Venezuela is "bothered that we are true partners, but they will have to live with it."

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SAN JOSE DE APARTADO  
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17. (C) MOD Ospina raised the issue of human rights and the San Jose de Apartado peace community. He referred to it as "a community that is an NGO with enormous lobbying powers in the United States and Europe." MOD Ospina explained that for many years, the Colombian military has been accused of human rights violations in the community, and said there remained challenges in providing security to a community that does not recognize state authority. Senator Reed asked what specific steps the GOC was taking to address the situation. MOD Ospina replied the GOC was making a "profound" effort to assist the community through bringing in medical and educational assistance. He added that U.S. officials are welcome to visit the community to witness the progress. "We want Ambassador Wood and the world to see and hear the testimonies of good faith there," he said.

WOOD